

# Chapter 11

## Exploring Democracy in Theory and in Practice

### Key Skill:

Using effective multimedia sources and communication strategies to present an informed position during a debate

### Key Terms and Concepts:

- authoritarian political systems
- consensus decision making
- direct democracy
- first past the post
- interest groups
- majority government
- minority government
- party solidarity
- plebiscite
- proportional representation
- referendum
- representation by population
- representative democracy
- will of the people

### Key Issue:

*To what extent should we embrace an ideology?*

### Related Issue:

*To what extent are the values of liberalism viable?*

### Chapter Issue:

**To what extent do democratic governments have an obligation to do what people want?**

### Question for Inquiry #1:

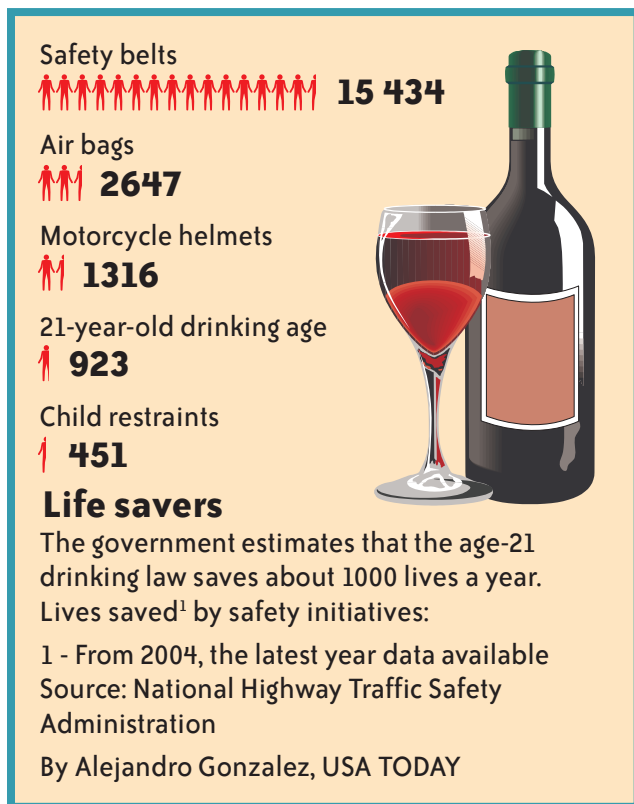
**How do democratic governments recognize the will of the people?**

### Question for Inquiry #2:

**Should democratic governments ever disregard the will of the people?**

Have a look at this American public service advertisement and the issue stated in its caption. Your position on this issue reflects your values, such as whether or not you believe 18-year-olds should have the right to drink. If the provincial government were to debate this issue next week and make a decision on the issue within a month, what would you want your government to do?

From your point of view, is the US government's argument—that lowering the drinking age below 21 will cost lives—a valid perspective? Or, are you more supportive of your individual right to make choices according to how they will affect your own life than you are of how they will affect the general public? How responsive are your local, provincial, or federal governments when it comes to representing your beliefs and values?



◀ **Figure 11-1** The US government estimates that the age-21 drinking law saves about 1000 lives a year. Should the drinking age be raised in Alberta?



▲ **Figures 11-2, 11-3** Citizens of a country can have very different wants, needs, expectations, beliefs, and values. How should governments respond to what citizens or voters want? Figure 11-2, Environment minister John Baird during Question Period in the House of Commons, 2008; Figure 11-3, thousands protest Stephen Harper's meetings with US president George W. Bush and Mexico's president Felipe Calderon. The meetings were held to better integrate trade and security across the continent.

## Chapter Issue:

*To what extent do democratic governments have an obligation to do what people want?*

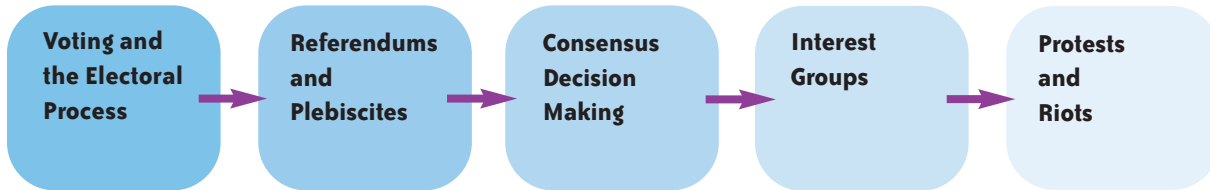
Governments exist because people need an institution to organize society. In a democracy, governments are expected to organize society according to the wishes of the people. In this chapter, you will explore the following Chapter Issue: *To what extent do democratic governments have an obligation to do what people want?* You will look at how governments reflect the will of the people—or what people want the government to do—and the situations in which the government chooses to follow that will or disregard it. Why would liberal governments sometimes choose to ignore the people's wishes? Under what circumstances would they do so? Has the government ever done something that you did not agree with or that negatively affected you? Exploring these issues will help you better address the Related Issue for Part Three: *To what extent are the values of liberalism viable?*

## Recognizing the Will of the People

### Question for Inquiry

1. How do democratic governments recognize the will of the people?

### In this section ...



In previous chapters, you explored some examples of authoritarian governments, such as the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI of France, the Stalinist government in the Soviet Union, and the fascist government in Nazi Germany. In contrast to democratic systems, rather than a focus on liberal values, one of the key underlying beliefs or values for **authoritarian political systems** is that all major decisions should be made by a small group of people or by one person (that is, the leader or dictator). Leaders of authoritarian governments believe that all decision making should be based on one common, collective set of values, ideas, and laws, requiring full citizen support and no opposition. Respect for or fear of law, order, and authority are key to the success of authoritarian systems. It is possible, however, that an authoritarian government also could practice some selective political and economic liberal values, if leaders deem them beneficial to their goals, such as capitalism in Nazi Germany.

Democracies, on the other hand, focus on liberal values, such as the individual rights of people when making decisions. One of the underlying values of the laws and the decision making in a democratic government is respect for the will of the people, or what the majority of citizens want. Democratic governments are generally made up of elected representatives of the people. These representatives consider and attempt to respect the will of the people in all decisions that they make as members of the government. They also balance the competing interests of various groups and individuals in an effort to make decisions based on what is best for society as a whole.

The notion that democratic governments are made of the people, by the people, and for the people has become one of the many ideas associated with the values of liberalism and democracy; so how do governments know what the will of the people is? As you examine this question throughout this section, keep in mind the Chapter Issue: *To what extent do democratic governments have an obligation to do what people want?*



"I told you that 'will of the people' stuff would backfire!"

▲ **Figure 11-4** In authoritarian governments, such as absolute monarchies in which kings and queens have total control over a country, what the citizens want can easily be overlooked or ignored. What does this cartoon say about recognizing what the citizens of a country want?

## READING GUIDE

When preparing for a debate, use guiding questions such as the following to help you develop your argument. Have you

- been assigned a position to argue or are you able to develop your own position?
- removed your viewpoint from your argument if it does not support your assigned position?
- thoroughly considered your own biases, the issue, and many possible responses to the issue?
- developed a clear, convincing position that you can defend?
- identified reasons and selected effective and reliable evidence from various media sources to support your position?
- considered the type of debate in which you will be taking part?
- used effective communication and persuasion strategies to respectfully and convincingly present your argument?

## Voting and the Electoral Process

A key question to ask of any democracy is “How will the democracy best reflect the will of the people?” One way it can do so is by having the citizens vote to decide who will represent them in government or about specific issues. The following criteria can be used to determine how well a political system reflects the will of the people:

- It allows for public input.
- It provides representation that reflects a range of public opinions.
- It holds politicians and their actions accountable to the voters.

No matter what type of democracy you live in, the power of the people begins with one very important activity: voting. The political party or leader with the most votes forms the government and determines the direction and sometimes the values that the country will embrace. In Canada, in order to vote, a person must be a Canadian citizen and 18 years of age or older.

In liberal democratic countries, rules and regulations ensure fair elections. In Canada, an organization called Elections Canada makes certain that every election is conducted according to democratic principles; for example, it ensures that people are not forced or scared into voting against their will and that they can cast their ballots anonymously. The purpose of these rules is to make sure that the elected government is the one that the voters really want.

Even though most democratic societies have checks and balances in place to make sure elections are fair and truly reflect the will of the people, sometimes major problems arise with the electoral process. One such issue is voter turnout. If there is not a strong voter turnout, how do we know that the winning government is truly the one the people wanted? If you *choose* not to be an active citizen and do not vote in an election, then you *choose* not to have your will reflected. Still, the outcome affects those who have not voted just as much as those who have.

## Direct and Representative Democracies

There are two main forms of democratic government: direct and representative.

In a **direct democracy**,

- people participate directly in decisions that need to be made, which can be very time consuming.
- people are directly in charge of the decisions made for the society (for example, they make policies and laws and participate in the justice system), which makes the government directly accountable to the will of the people.

In a **representative democracy**,

- citizens elect candidates to represent their values and beliefs in government and to make decisions on their behalf.

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

Are you looking forward to being able to vote? Can you already vote? What do you think could be done to increase voter turnout? What could be done to attract people between the ages of 18 and 25 to the polls?



- there are different levels of government in which the representatives debate issues, make decisions, and have specific responsibilities (for example, local mayor and councillors, provincial Members of the Legislative Assembly [MLAs], and federal Members of Parliament [MPs]).
- some elements of direct democracy are occasionally used (for example, referendums in which all citizens are given an opportunity to vote yes or no on an important issue).

Most modern democracies, such as Canada, have chosen a form of representative government to reflect the will of the people. This is due to the challenges involved in getting large numbers of people across vast distances together to make decisions and due to the time and effort it would take individual citizens to research and understand every issue that government must address.

### Representation by Population

One important principle of citizen involvement in a representative democracy is the concept of **representation by population** (or **rep by pop**)—the idea that each citizen should have one vote, and that each elected representative should represent roughly the same number of voters as all other representatives. The municipalities, provinces, territories, and country are divided up into voting districts, or electoral ridings (or constituencies), most containing approximately the same number of voters. A system based on representation by population is intended to reflect the will of the people in an equitable way. However, when the ridings are uneven, some parts of the country have a stronger voice and more influence in government than others. For example, in 2006, Prince Edward Island had 4 ridings for 107 677 eligible voters (or 27 000 per riding), while Ontario had 106 ridings for 8 536 359 eligible voters (or 80 000 per riding).

### First Past the Post

In many democracies, such as Canada, candidates run in their electoral ridings, and the winner is the candidate with the most votes. This system is called **first past the post** (FPTP), a term that comes from horse racing. The first candidate past the post is the one who wins the highest number of votes in a particular area.

**Figure 11-6** In horse racing, the term *first past the post* refers to a horse that is the first to cross the finish line. In Canada, elections run according to a similar principle: the candidate to get the most votes in a riding wins, and all the other candidates in that riding lose.



▲ **Figure 11-5** Voting is a fundamental right and responsibility of all citizens living in a democracy. Why do you think some people choose not to exercise this right?



He or she wins the election and represents all of the people who live in that area. In each riding, there is one seat in the House of Commons that the winning candidate will occupy to represent the voters in his or her riding. In this system, the “winner takes all.” Consider the following example:

**Figure 11-7** Election results for Edmonton Centre in the 2008 Canadian federal election

►

Riding: Edmonton Centre Election Results (October 14, 2008):		
Candidates	Per cent of vote in the riding (rounded to the nearest whole number)	Per cent of seats won (1 out of 1 available)
Conservative	49	100
Liberal	27	0
NDP	15	0
Green	8	0

Source: Elections Canada, [http://enr.elections.ca/ElectoralDistricts\\_e.aspx](http://enr.elections.ca/ElectoralDistricts_e.aspx).

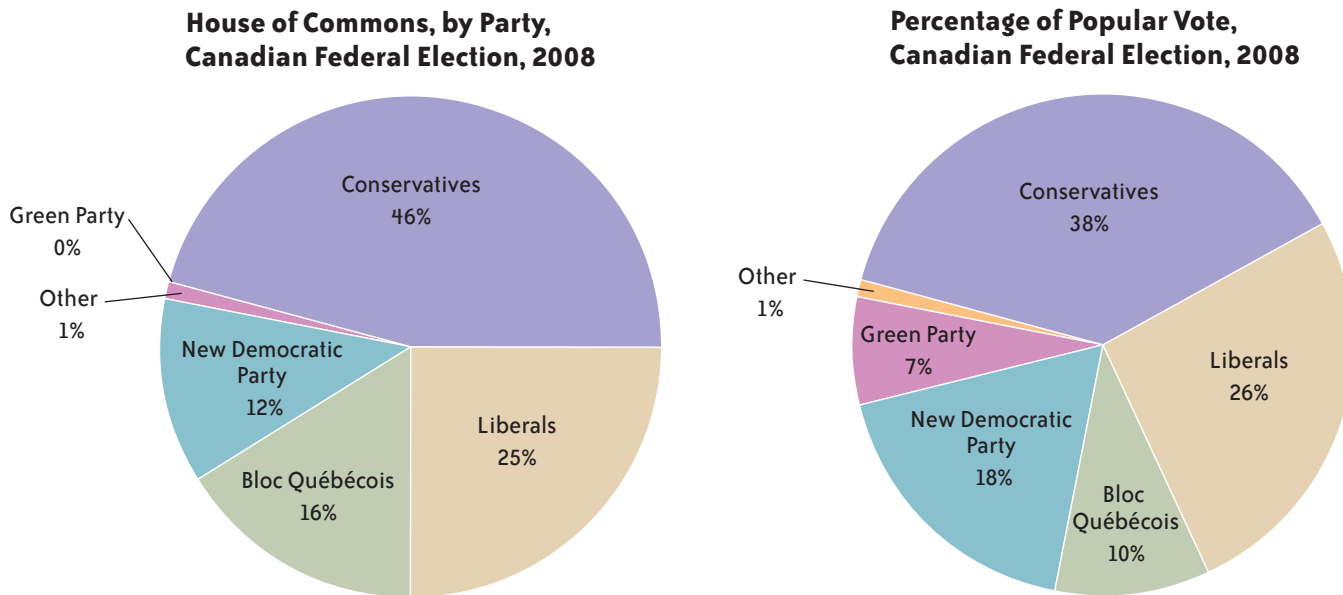
Do you think this system could be considered unfair? What value do the votes cast for a losing candidate have? Should every vote count?

Proportional Representation

**Figure 11-8** In Sweden, Germany, Brazil, South Korea, and many other liberal democracies, a different voting system is used: **proportional representation**. In this system, voters generally vote for a party rather than a candidate, and party representatives are assigned to sit in Parliament based upon the percentage or proportion of the popular vote their party receives.



Examine the following example. In Canada's 2008 federal election, seats in the House of Commons were filled using the first past the post system, and produced the following result:



▲ **Figure 11-9** Federal election 2008: percentage of seats by party and percentage of popular vote

However, if proportional representation had been used instead, seats in the House of Commons would have been assigned to parties according to their degree of support among voters. Examine the results that the two different voting systems produced or would have produced, and answer the following questions:

- Which party or parties actually ended up with a greater proportion of seats in the House of Commons than was reflected in the popular vote for their party?
- Which party or parties would be better represented than they are now if a system of proportional representation had been used?
- Which voting system—first past the post or proportional representation—seems to more accurately reflect the will of the people?

Supporters of proportional representation argue that it is more democratic than a voting system based on first past the post, as every voter's vote counts toward the final make-up of the elected assembly, rather than only the votes cast for the winning candidates. Some provinces—notably Ontario and British Columbia—have examined the possibility of implementing some form of proportional representation for their provincial elections.



Critics of proportional representation argue that it often results in a **minority government** (where the winning party obtains less than half of the seats in the assembly) or in a **coalition** (where two or more parties have to work together to form the government). They argue that these types of governments are less effective and less stable than a **majority government** (where the winning party obtains more than half of the seats), which tends to be produced more often using the first past the post voting method.

A majority government, where the winning party holds over 50 per cent of the seats, is often able to achieve greater results or reforms because there can be less opposition to its policies. However, majority governments are sometimes accused of not listening to the people. A minority government, where the party in power as government holds less than half of the seats, may find it difficult to implement its policies or reforms.

A minority government needs to collaborate and make deals with opposition parties to ensure that its bills will be supported in the House of Commons. Minority governments run the risk of being defeated by the opposition parties before the end of their term of office if they are not acting in a way that is accountable to the people.

If the government loses an important vote, such as a vote on a bill involving spending or taxation, it must resign. Losing such a vote is called a “loss of confidence.” In other words, the government has lost the confidence of a majority of the people’s representatives in the House of Commons if its legislation is defeated. This feature of the Canadian political system—where the government (executive branch) is held accountable by the entire House of Commons (the legislative branch)—is known as *responsible government*. Why might minority governments be more accountable to public opinion than majority governments?

### Party Politics

Political parties are another way in which government is meant to reflect the will of the people. A party’s policies reflect a particular ideology, and voters choose to vote for the party whose ideology most closely reflects their own. The main federal parties in Canada are the Liberal, Conservative, New Democratic, Bloc Québécois, and Green Parties of Canada. As of 2009, there were 19 registered federal political parties in Canada. A candidate can also run without being a member of a political party; such a candidate is called an independent. MPs are often expected to vote on an issue as they feel their constituents would want them to vote. This can lead to a conflict of interest if their parties have chosen a position on the issue that does not match the popular opinion in their own constituencies. In this case, representatives can argue the case for their constituents privately within party caucus meetings, but once an important decision is reached inside the party, all members of the party are generally expected to support it or be seen as disloyal. This is known as **party solidarity**. Members can be asked to leave the party if they refuse to side with the party. There is even a person called the party whip, whose job it is, in part, to ensure party loyalty.

### PAUSE AND REFLECT

To whom should a party member be loyal: the voters in his or her riding, the party, or both? To what extent does the idea of party loyalty reflect liberal values?



▲ **Figure 11-10** In 2000, MP Deborah Grey was one of several Canadian Alliance Party members to leave the party in protest of its new leader, Stockwell Day. Grey felt that her values were not being reflected and acted on her beliefs. The Canadian Alliance Party, once known as the Reform Party, later merged with the Progressive Conservative Party to become the Conservative Party of Canada.

## Free Vote

In special cases, party members are free to vote as they choose rather than with their parties in what is called a **free vote**. These free votes are usually about controversial issues on which the party cannot agree to a party policy, such as whether or not we should legally allow capital punishment (the death penalty), gay marriage, abortion, or legalized prostitution. In some countries, such as the United States, elected officials are generally free to vote against their parties' positions, and every vote is considered a free vote.

In 1976, MPs had a free vote on the abolition of capital punishment from the Canadian Criminal Code. Out of a total of 255 present for the vote, MPs voted 131 to 124 in favour of abolishing capital punishment in one of the closest votes in Canadian parliamentary history. Although the Liberal government introduced the bill to abolish the death penalty, 37 out of 141 Liberal members voted against the bill, while 16 out of 95 Conservative members voted for it. This free vote succeeded in developing legislation that replaced capital punishment with mandatory life sentences for all first-degree murder sentences (without a possibility of parole for 25 years).

## Accountability

No matter which party forms the government, it is accountable to the people, a fundamental liberal democratic principle. How does this work in Canada? In the House of Commons, the opposition parties are supposed to hold the government party accountable for its actions. During question period, opposition members of Parliament may question the Cabinet on any of its decisions, and the Cabinet ministers must respond to the questions. This system allows the opposition to keep the government on its toes to make sure it is making the best possible decisions. This is one feature of parliamentary democracy that ensures that other positions on an issue are heard. Some people claim, however, that politicians arguing and accusing one another of incompetence actually undermines our trust in government and this may be one reason for a low voter turnout in Canada.

Another important way to keep government officials accountable to the people is to have freedom of the press. In Canada, journalists are free to report and comment on government actions. There is even a press gallery overlooking the floor of the House of Commons, where journalists are welcome to attend, observe, and report on the proceedings. Often, it is journalists who will publish or broadcast a story that will cause a government to reconsider its actions.

## Referendums and Plebiscites

In a democracy, we have elections that allow people to express who they want to represent them in Parliament and to lead their country. Although the elected leader and his or her party are supposed to represent the will of



### PAUSE AND REFLECT

**To what extent do you believe that the rejection of the death penalty in Canada reflects the values of liberalism and the will of the people?**



▲ **Figure 11-11** In a referendum held in Québec in 1995, voters were asked whether Québec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership. In this image, one can see the two possible responses to this question.

### **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

**Do you believe that Canada's political leaders were right to put the Accord to a national referendum vote? When should governments use referendums to make political decisions for the country?**

most of the people in the country, there are certain issues on which the leader and his or her government must seek further input from the electorate. Sometimes issues are so crucial to a country that every citizen eligible to vote will actually receive a direct vote to either accept or reject a proposal. This is known as a **referendum** or a **plebiscite**.

Essentially referendums and plebiscites are forms of direct democracy that are sometimes used in representative democracies. In Canada, we have had three referendums at the federal level. Referendums are binding, which means the government must act on the results of the proposal. A plebiscite is more like a poll of people's opinions. Unlike a referendum, the government does not have to change its policies to reflect the result of a plebiscite. An example of a plebiscite might be a community asking its residents to vote on whether or not it should add fluoride to its water supply. In 1942, Canadians voted in a plebiscite about whether or not citizens should be forced into joining the military (conscripted) to fight during the Second World War. Referendums and plebiscites are two of the most direct ways a democratic government can know and better understand the will of the people.

### ***A National Referendum: The Charlottetown Accord***

In 1992, the Canadian government hoped to reform Canada's constitution using the terms of an agreement known as the Charlottetown Accord. The agreement was the result of lengthy discussions between federal, provincial, and territorial government representatives, and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis groups. It dealt with issues such as the sharing of power between the levels of government, the recognition of Québec as a distinct society within Canada, reforming the Senate, and granting Aboriginal self-government and representation in Parliament. In 1987, the Meech Lake Accord had tried to accomplish similar goals but failed because some representatives felt it did not represent a balance of rights that benefited all Canadians. Government representatives generally felt that the Charlottetown Accord represented a better compromise and that the public would support it as a means of resolving the ongoing constitutional debate.

Thus, instead of a vote by government representatives, a national referendum was held asking the question "Do you agree that the Constitution of Canada should be renewed on the basis of the agreement reached on August 28, 1992?" Although the majority of voters in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories voted in a favour of the Accord, 54 per cent of voters across Canada voted against it. As a result, the will of the people—or at least the majority of the people—was followed, and the federal government did not go ahead with the proposed revisions to the Constitution.

Some criticisms of the Accord at the time included that it did not go far enough in reforming the Senate, that it favoured Québec over other provinces, or that it did not go far enough to recognize Québec as a distinct

society. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's low popularity with the Canadian public at that time and former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's public comments against the Accord may also have had an impact on the vote. Regardless, the will of the people rejected the Accord and the issues addressed by the Accord are still largely unresolved today.

## Consensus Decision Making

Not all Canadian organizations and governments use voting as a means of making a decision. In some communities, decisions are made through **consensus decision making** in which a group of individuals shares ideas, solutions, and concerns to find a resolution that all members can accept. Some Aboriginal communities in North America have used consensus decision making to express the will of their people on many issues over the course of history. For example, whenever you see a talking circle, sentencing circle, or restorative justice implemented (processes you read about in Chapter 3), consensus decision making is being used.

The government of Canada has recognized the consensus model used by many organizations and governments as a part of the decision-making process. For example, elected representatives of the Nunatsiavut Government of the Labrador Inuit, which you examined in Chapter 10, use a consensus decision-making process to make their decisions. As well, the Canadian government includes restorative justice programs, such as sentencing circles, which use consensus decision making within the federal justice system. As you explored in Chapter 3, restorative justice programs involve the voluntary participation of the victim and the offender, as well as members of the community and representatives from the justice system, who work together to reach a consensus about a sentence for the offender. A specific example of consensus decision making in action in the Canadian justice system is the Tsuu T'ina First Nation's Peacemaker Court, which completes four rounds of discussion to examine the nature of the wrong committed and its impact, and tries to reach agreement on the case.

**Figures 11-12, 11-13** In Figure 11-12, court administrator Ellery Starlight and Crown prosecutor Lauren Wuttunee discuss whether a case should be settled in the peacemaker talking circle. In Figure 11-13, the judge, judicial clerks, and Crown prosecutor in the peacemaker courtroom.





## PAUSE AND REFLECT

Have you ever reached a consensus on a decision with your friends, your classmates, or your family? How were you able to come to an agreement about the decision that was being made? What did you find were the most effective and most challenging aspects of this process?

Another example of consensus decision making in Canada is the process used by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) to address concerns such as air pollution and toxic waste. This organization of federal, provincial, and territorial government ministers meets once a year to discuss environmental issues and promote co-operation among the different levels of government. CCME members work together to establish nationally consistent environmental standards, strategies, and objectives related to the environment.

Supporters of consensus decision making argue that it promotes equality and is inclusive, allowing everyone to participate in a decision. In addition, the process encourages a high level of commitment to the decision from those involved, and may result in a better decision because it requires more input from those affected. Critics of consensus decision making argue that it is time-consuming and emotionally demanding, and participants may not reach a solution. How effective is this form of decision making in reflecting the will of the people?

## Interest Groups

The candidates who win elections do not usually represent all the values of all the people in their ridings. When this is the case, groups with minority views or groups of people with different ideologies must have an outlet to express their opinions. This is where **interest groups** factor into our political system.

Interest groups are also known as special interest groups, lobby groups, advocacy groups, or even pressure groups. Interest groups are organizations that seek to influence elected officials. Their goal is to encourage legislation or decisions that represent their specific beliefs or values, or to prevent the passage of legislation that does not represent their values.

Interest groups play a very important role in democratic societies because they allow individuals to voice their opinions. Furthermore, governments also benefit because they become more aware of the will of the people. According to some estimates, there are over 20 000 interest

**Figure 11-14** These are some examples of interest groups that are active in Canada. Do you think these groups or other interest groups that you are aware of are effective at expressing the people's will? Can you think of any other ways for people to express their interests? What do you believe are the most effective ways for people to express their ideas and values about important government decisions?



© 1986 Panda symbol WWF-World Wide Fund For Nature (also known as World Wildlife Fund)  
® "WWF" is a WWF Registered Trademark

GREENPEACE



**MADD**   
Mothers Against Drunk Driving™  
Les mères contre l'alcool au volant™

groups in Canada. When many differing opinions exist, how does the government know which of these groups actually represent the will of the majority of people? How can one government balance the needs of different minority groups with those of the majority?

## Protests and Riots

When a democratic government seems to fail to address the needs of its citizens, it can create frustration. Have you ever felt like you had something very important to say, but no one was giving you the opportunity to say it? Or perhaps you did get to voice your opinion, but you felt that no one listened to you or gave you any credibility? What did you do next? Governments cannot always know what every individual in society wants, and even if they did, it would be impossible to act on the behalf of every citizen. Governments must choose actions and policies that will satisfy what they believe are the majority of people or what they believe is in the best interests of the common good. However, when some groups in society feel that government decision makers are not hearing them, they may reach a breaking point of frustration, which can lead to protests or more violent consequences such as riots.

Protests and riots are expressions of the frustrations of people in society who may feel ignored by government institutions or have a desire to raise the profile of an important issue. There are peaceful and violent protests, but the main point about such demonstrations is that people want their voices to be included in the decision-making process.



### PAUSE AND REFLECT

**Have you ever seen a protest or participated in one yourself? What was the issue? How effective did you feel the protest was at getting the message across to the general public and at affecting government decision making?**



▲ **Figure 11-15** In Montréal on August 27, 2008, artists held the largest protest in the history of Québec. Artists and their supporters were responding to sudden federal government cuts to arts and culture, potentially totalling \$45 million. Josée Verner, the Canadian heritage minister at the time, did not appear at the protest and later commented that most members of the public were supportive and not critical of the cuts. Many protesters felt that the minister was out of touch with public opinion and was attacking the cultural roots of Canadians.

## Summary

In contrast to authoritarian systems, liberal democracies value the **will of the people** as a part of the decision-making process and provide a number of ways for people to express their will to the government. The most common way in which people express their will is through voting and the electoral system. A democracy can be either **direct**, in which all the people vote on all governmental decisions, or **representative**, in which the people vote for representatives who then make decisions on issues.

In a representative democracy, **representation by population** is used to decide how many representatives are elected for each area. In some democracies, during an election, the candidate with the most votes wins, which is referred to as **first past the post**. In many others, a **proportional representation** voting system is used to determine how voters will be represented. In Canada and other liberal democracies, candidates belong to political parties that represent certain beliefs and values. In most cases, MPs are expected to vote with their parties, an idea known as **party solidarity**, except in the rare case of a **free vote**.

Other ways in which the will of the people is expressed include **referendums** and **plebiscites** in which people are asked to vote directly on specific issues that are thought to be critical to the welfare of the country. Some Canadian organizations and governments use **consensus decision making** rather than voting to decide on a resolution to an issue. This allows the opinions of all representatives to be heard. **Interest groups** represent the will of specific groups of people by influencing elected officials to vote on issues based on the groups' values and beliefs. In cases when people feel that their will is not being followed by government representatives, they may express themselves through public protesting or rioting.

In all of these ways, liberal democratic governments attempt to understand what the people want and their beliefs and values. You should now be able to answer this section's Question for Inquiry: *How do democratic governments recognize the will of the people?* What insight have you gained into the Chapter Issue: *To what extent do democratic governments have an obligation to do what people want?*

## Knowledge and Understanding

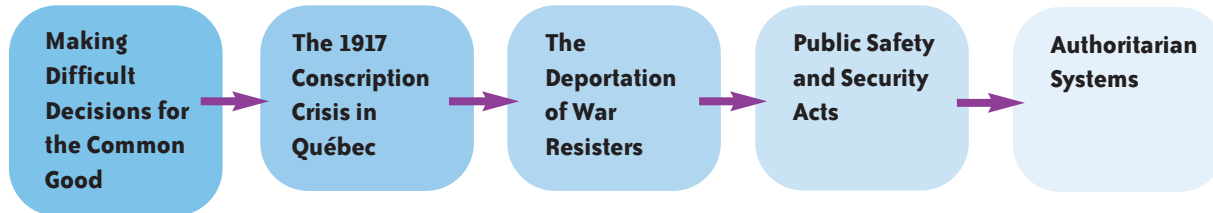
- 1 Explain the main differences between authoritarian and democratic political systems and how they view the will of the people.
- 2 Explain the difference between direct and representative democracies. Do you think that representative democracies can reflect the will of the people? What role can the type of voting system play in reflecting the will of the people?
- 3 Describe the difference between majority and minority governments. Identify one advantage and one disadvantage of each. Does a minority or a majority government better reflect the will of the people? Why?
- 4 Elections are one way of giving the government a direction. What are some alternative ways citizens can voice their opinions? What do you believe is the most effective way to express your interests about specific issues in a democracy such as Canada? Why?

## Disregarding the Will of the People

### Question for Inquiry

2. Should democratic governments ever disregard the will of the people?

In this section ...



**Figure 11-16** ▲ Claiming to ensure public safety, the federal government used the War Measures Act to force Japanese Canadians to relocate from their homes in British Columbia's coastal communities to remote internment camps for most of the Second World War. Should governments disregard the rights of some citizens to protect the security of others?



In a liberal democracy, the government is expected to act on the will of the people. But what if the people are wrong? What if the people make decisions based on fear or an incomplete version of the story? In some cases, the government is better informed than the people about an issue or is more concerned than the average person about protecting the common good for all citizens. For example, public health issues such as the outbreak of SARS or mad cow disease require the government to step in and protect the safety of all Canadians. In such situations, the government may take measures such as restricting the freedom of movement of the population, regardless of what citizens might think of such restrictions. This may seem contradictory in a democracy in which the people are essentially the “rulers” of government. In this section, you will explore the following question: *Should democratic governments ever disregard the will of the people?*

## Making Difficult Decisions for the Common Good

Whether it is democratic or authoritarian, every government faces urgent issues and times of crisis. While an authoritarian government is not generally concerned with reflecting the will of the people, a liberal democratic government that attempts to reflect the people’s will may find that crisis situations challenge its ability to do so. When societies encounter times of hardship, liberal democratic governments may find it necessary to disregard liberal values such as the will of the people because of the possibility of social unrest and the need for immediate solutions. An event such as an economic recession, a conflict that results in a transition of power, or the devastation caused by a natural disaster might lead a democratic government to ignore the will of the people.

No matter what type of government is in power, issues and crises may affect people in the same way: they create an atmosphere of need. In such circumstances, the demands of the people may be overlooked or ignored by government officials focused on bigger issues, such as the economic stability of the country or the public safety and security of its citizens. Even when politicians are aware of the people’s demands, a democratic government may ignore them if it believes that these demands come into conflict with the perceived needs of the country or the common good.

Thus, are there times when the liberal democratic governments might be in a better position than its citizens to judge what will best serve the common good? Are there times when these decisions might not be in the best interests of some, or even many, of the people? In the following sections, you will explore Canadian examples that will help you formulate answers to these questions.

## The 1917 Conscription Crisis in Québec

A historic example of the Canadian government going against the will of the people occurred during the Conscription Crisis of 1917. On August 4,

### PAUSE AND REFLECT

**Do democratic government practices or values change when a government is faced with an urgent issue or a crisis? If so, when is this change acceptable or unacceptable to the people?**

1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany after Germany invaded neutral Belgium. The entire British Empire was automatically at war with Germany after the British declaration. This meant that Canada would be expected to contribute to the British war effort. Canada's population during the First World War was approximately 8 million. The Canadian Army was made up of volunteers who eventually numbered over 600 000. This meant that 7.5 per cent of the Canadian population was serving in the Canadian military.

When Canada first entered the war as part of the British Empire in 1914, many Canadians volunteered to serve in the Canadian military. The battles of Verdun and the Somme in 1916 saw massive casualties, however, and getting reinforcements was critical. As the war progressed and the numbers of casualties increased, the Canadian government under Prime Minister Robert Borden began to explore the idea of conscription to fill the ranks of the Canadian Army.

Many people in Québec, largely Francophones, felt that this was Britain's war and did not see why they should fight for Britain. France was also one of the major combatants, but why would the French-speaking Canadiens fight for France? What had France done after the British Conquest in 1763 to help the Canadiens? Also, why should Francophones fight on behalf of Canada, a country that had recently allowed Ontario and Manitoba to abolish the French language as a language of instruction in schools?

On July 6, 1917, the Military Service Act was passed. This Act made service in the Canadian military mandatory for all male citizens between the ages of 20 and 45. The only people who were exempt from serving in the military were those who were working in critical industries such as munitions factory workers and farmers, conscientious objectors whose religion forbade them to fight and kill, and others whose absence might cause serious hardship, such as an only son who was supporting a widowed mother.

On behalf of the Francophones in Québec, nationalist Henri Bourassa made the following comment:

*"We are opposed to further enlistments for the war in Europe, whether by conscription or otherwise, for the following reasons: (1) Canada has already made a military display, in men and money, proportionally superior to that of any nation engaged in the war; (2) any further weakening of the man-power of the country would seriously handicap agricultural production and other essential industries; (3) an increase in the war budget of Canada spells national bankruptcy; (4) it threatens the economic life of the nation and, eventually, its political independence; (5) conscription means national disunion and strife, and would thereby hurt the cause of the Allies to a much greater extent than the addition of a few thousand soldiers to their fighting forces could bring them help and comfort."*

**—Source: Henri Bourassa, "Win the War and Lose Canada,"  
*Le Devoir*, July 12, 1917, p. 3.**

In Québec, there were many protests and marches against the Military Service Act. Over the last weekend in March of 1918, a young man in Québec City was arrested because he did not have exemption papers. A mob formed and burned the Military Service Act offices and then turned its attention to English-owned businesses. Local police were ineffective at stopping the mob, so an anti-conscription riot broke out and the federal government sent in 700 troops from Ontario to restore order. On April 1, 1918, in the neighbourhood of Saint-Roch, the soldiers were attacked by people throwing snowballs, bricks, ice, and rocks. The soldiers opened fire and killed five people in the crowd.

When the First World War ended on November 11, 1918, only 24 000 of the conscripted soldiers had seen action in Europe. The difference of opinion about what Canadian citizens should do during the war divided the country. Some of this bitterness persists even today. Do you think the Canadian government could have balanced the will of Francophones in Québec with the need for further troops? Was the government justified in disregarding the will of some Canadians by imposing conscription?

The Deportation of War Resisters

**Figure 11-17** In an online survey of a representative national sample, more than 3 in 5 Canadians (64 per cent) say they would agree to give these US soldiers the opportunity to remain in Canada as permanent residents. Based on this survey, what was the will of the Canadian people concerning war resisters staying in Canada?

As you read in Chapter 10, American Vietnam War resisters came to Canada from the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Canada faced a similar situation recently regarding Iraq War resisters. In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq as part of President George W. Bush’s “War on Terror.” Some members of the US military felt the war in Iraq was unjust, however, and refused to serve there. These people left the United States and came to Canada to avoid being sent to Iraq. In June 2008, there were approximately 200 American war resisters in Canada. American war resisters can face up

Military Deserters: A Public Opinion Survey							
Survey Question: “As you may know, the House of Commons recently passed a non-binding motion calling on the federal government to grant permanent residence to US soldiers who fled to Canada after refusing to take part in the Iraq War. There are thought to be about 200 American military deserters in Canada. Do you agree or disagree with allowing US soldiers to become permanent residents of Canada?”							
	Region						
	National	BC	AB	MB/SK	ON	QC	ATL
Agree	64%	64%	52%	63%	63%	70%	63%
Disagree	32%	34%	44%	33%	33%	26%	29%
Not sure	4%	1%	4%	4%	4%	4%	8%

© Angus Reid Strategies Corp. 2009

Source: “Angus Reid Poll: Most Canadians Would Grant Permanent Residence to U.S. Military Deserters,” June 27, 2008, <http://www.angusreidstrategies.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=news&newsid=255>.



◀ **Figure 11-18** Protesters march in Toronto on September 13, 2008, during the Pan-Canadian Day of Action in support of American resisters to the Iraq War.

to five years in jail, a dishonourable discharge, and the loss of all pay and benefits if they are convicted in the United States of desertion. In a poll, Canadian citizens favoured allowing these people to stay in Canada.

On June 3, 2008, the New Democratic Party put forward a motion in the House of Commons to allow war resisters to stay in Canada. MPs voted 137 to 110 in favour of the motion; however, the motion was non-binding, meaning that the minority Conservative government did not have to follow the results of this particular vote. The Conservatives chose to continue deporting the war resisters back to the United States. One resister was deported in July 2008 and another with his family in September 2008. Some Canadians responded to the government's actions in a series of cross-country protests:

*At a number of demonstrations, protesters pointed to a non-binding motion passed in the House of Commons in June to allow American war resisters [to] stay. It was supported by all parties but the Conservatives.*

*“If we truly believe in democracy, we must not allow Stephen Harper to ignore the will of Parliament,” said New Democrat Olivia Chow, who attended the rally in Toronto.*

*“Because if he continues to ignore the House of Commons and Parliament, he’s ignoring the will of the people.”*

—Source: Tamsyn Burgmann, “Nationwide protests call on war resisters to stay.” *Canadian Press*, September 13, 2008, <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Politics/2008/09/13/6757291-cp.html>.



What does this example demonstrate about the role of the will of the people in government policy? Why might the government have chosen to ignore the will of some of the people in this case?

## Public Safety and Security Acts

Is public security a good enough reason for a government to disregard the will of the people? This question brings up an interesting point: individuals may have to give up their own interests, including some rights and freedoms, in order to guarantee public safety and security. The first decade of the 21st century has seen the threat of terrorism become a primary concern of most liberal democracies. In times of conflict and threat, governments often create or enact legislation that allows them to disregard the will of the people. Do you think there are any circumstances under which the government should suspend civil rights in the name of national security?

### *The War Measures Act*

The War Measures Act was a piece of Canadian legislation that allowed the government to suspend civil rights and liberties in the name of national security or public safety. The War Measures Act was used during the First World War, the Second World War, and the October Crisis of 1970. Invoking the War Measures Act disregarded people's rights in order to preserve the security of Canadian society in general.

**Figure 11-19** Many Québec nationalists opposed the government's actions, believing the use of the War Measures Act in 1970 was unjustified and was intended to silence all political opposition.





## The War Measures Act— An Excessive Reaction?

During the October Crisis, police were given extraordinary powers to conduct searches and to arrest and detain suspected terrorists. The government's response to the crisis was highly controversial.

*"We do not know how large the revolutionary army is or was, nor the extent of their power to create disorder and anarchy. Until we receive proof to the contrary... we will believe that...rushing into the enforcement of the War Measures Act was a panicky and altogether excessive reaction."*

—René Lévesque, leader of the Parti Québécois,  
October 17, 1970.

*"This government...is acting to make clear to kidnappers and revolutionaries and assassins that in this country laws are made and changed by the elected representatives of all Canadians—not by a handful of self-selected dictators."*

—Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau,  
October 16, 1970.

*"I had three small children at the time, and though the military presence in the streets of Montréal was certainly frightening—the prospect of the FLQ murdering and kidnapping people was more frightening. As a mother, I felt that Trudeau was right to err on the side of caution. He was protecting the public."*

—Marie-Ange Tremblay, resident of Montréal  
during the October Crisis.

*"I was a resident of Montréal at the time. Trudeau overreacted. It was a political show of strength. Though many Québécois sympathised with the FLQ's desire for a free, independent Québec, many didn't agree with the violence...But to call in the army for a half a dozen troublemakers...that is what I call an overreaction."*

—Lisette Verlez, nursing student in Montréal  
during the October Crisis.

- 1 Which specific words or phrases from these speakers would best support your argument if you were assigned the following position in a debate: In a democracy, it is the government's job to ensure the safety of citizens at all costs. Organize your choices in order of least to most effective, and provide reasons for each choice.
- 2 Given the challenges of the situation, were there any other ways the Canadian government could have balanced the need for public safety and security and individual freedoms?
- 3 How is it sometimes difficult for the government to follow the will of the people when there is no single unified will?

The War Measures Act was last used during the October Crisis of 1970. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau invoked the act in response to the kidnappings of a British diplomat and a Québec politician by the FLQ, or *le Front de libération du Québec*. The FLQ was a radical separatist group responsible for a series of bombings in Québec during the 1960s. With the enactment of the War Measures Act, membership in the FLQ was outlawed and civil liberties were temporarily suspended. Under the emergency measures, police arrested more than 450 people without laying charges. Some were detained up to 90 days. Although many Canadians supported the federal government's actions at the time, it caused much resentment in Québec, as many of those who were arrested were known to support Québécois nationalism.

## OTTAWA MOVES TO TRACK CITIZENS THROUGH LAPTOPS, BLACKBERRYS AND CELLPHONES...



▲ **Figure 11-20** What point of view does this cartoon reflect regarding Canada's public security acts? Do you think there are times when it is acceptable for democratic governments to suspend people's individual rights and freedoms in the interests of public safety and security? Why?

### **The Emergencies Act**

After the October Crisis and the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, the government was forced to re-examine its use of power during times of crisis. Partly as a result of this examination, the Emergencies Act replaced the War Measures Act in 1988.

The Emergencies Act authorizes the taking of special temporary measures for the safety and security of citizens during national emergencies. The Act covers four types of emergencies: public welfare emergencies (such as natural disasters or major accidents), public order emergencies (such as security threats), international emergencies (such as intimidation or violence that threatens the security of Canada or its allies), and war emergencies (such as war or other armed conflicts involving Canada or its allies). The Act includes restrictions on how and when the government can suspend civil liberties and provides Parliament with the right to review and revoke emergency powers, making the government accountable to Parliament for any decisions to use the Act. In addition, any emergency measures taken by the government have to respect citizens' rights, as outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

### **The Anti-terrorism Act**

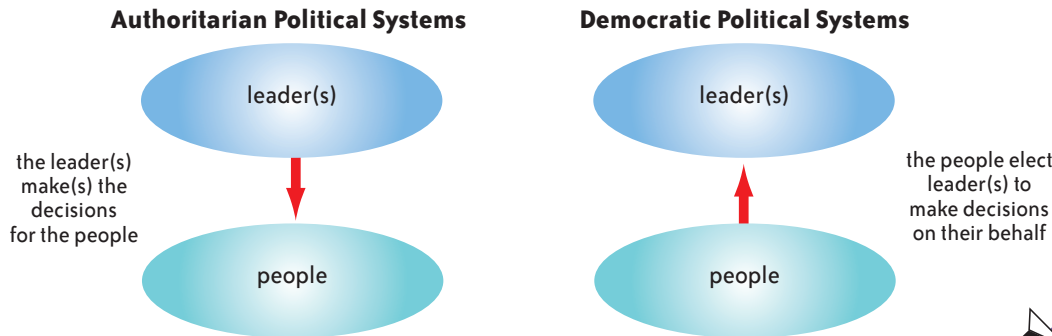
In addition to passing the Emergencies Act, the Canadian federal government has passed laws to respond to potential emergencies related to terrorism. The Anti-terrorism Act was passed in 2001, shortly after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on the United States. The Act defines what terrorism is (an act committed "for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause and with the intention of intimidating the public or government and causing serious harm or damage to public safety, property, or services") and makes it a punishable offence under the Canadian Criminal Code.

One controversial aspect of the Act is that it allows for the temporary suspension of individual rights and freedoms for people suspected of terrorist activities or suspected of having knowledge about such activities. Police have sweeping powers to act on suspected acts of terrorism; for example, they may detain suspects for up to three days, use electronic surveillance, have judges compel witnesses to give evidence, and designate groups as terrorist organizations. Some Canadians have responded negatively to this Act, as it suspends the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Charter. Others have been supportive of this legislation as they see it as necessary to protect the safety and security of Canadians.

The Anti-terrorism Act has been under review since Parliament voted not to extend its more controversial clauses in 2007. In 2008, with Bill S-3, the federal government tried again to bring back some of the more controversial aspects of the Anti-terrorism Act and make them available for another five-year term.

## Authoritarian Political Systems

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, one of the key underlying elements of **authoritarian political systems** is that all major decisions are made by a small group of people or by one person. Leaders of authoritarian political systems are not necessarily concerned with following the will of the people, and instead are driven by their own vision of what society should be like. Leaders in these types of systems may also choose whether or not, or to what extent, they are accountable to the people.



**Figure 11-21** ▲ The direction of the arrows shows how decisions are made in each system. In an authoritarian political system, the decisions are made “from the top down,” and it is the role of the citizen to obey these decisions. In a democracy, the decisions are made “from the bottom up,” and the citizen has the opportunity to actively participate in the decision-making process.



### PAUSE AND REFLECT

**Think back to the examples of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in Chapter 7. In what ways were these characteristics evident under their authoritarian leaders?**

### Characteristics of Authoritarian Political Systems

- Power is held by the leader and the people must always acknowledge this leader.
- Individual rights and freedoms are not usually highly valued, and the role of the citizen is to obey and contribute to society or to the state.
- Political participation by the people is limited and often controlled (for example, planned demonstrations in support of the leadership).
- If elections are held, often the candidates are from the same party or personally selected by the leaders. Most times people are not free to run against them.
- Dissent, or speaking out against the government or its policies, is limited.
- The media (for example, journalists, news programs, the Internet) are censored.
- Schools and/or youth movements are used by the government to teach the youth to accept the authority of the leader (a technique known as “indoctrination”).
- Military and police forces are used to maintain control, and may intervene in political matters, for example by arresting political opponents or those who speak out against the government.





▲ **Figure 11-22** The “Divine Right of Kings” granted King Louis XVI of France the right to rule over his people as a representative of God. According to this doctrine, if his subjects criticized him, they were criticizing God as well.

In authoritarian governments, liberal values are not generally a priority. Sometimes leaders of these governments may speak of common values and claim to hold them, but do they honour them? If the country has a constitution, do the leader and the government abide by it? Consider the relationship between the government and the people as you read about the following examples of authoritarian political systems.

### **Absolute Monarchies**

An **absolute monarchy** is a form of government where a king or queen (a monarch) inherits the right to rule and was likely given the authority to rule by tradition or religious belief. Sometimes legislatures or other law-making bodies are allowed, but lack real power and the number of voting citizens is limited. For example, in France during the reign of Louis XVI (1774–1792), a legislative assembly called the *États généraux* (Estates-General) met, but the true power remained with the king. In an absolute monarchy, there is no constitution that limits the powers of the monarch or gives rights to the people. Few absolute monarchies exist today.

### **Military Dictatorships**



**Figure 11-23** ▲ In 2007, thousands of people marched in peaceful anti-government protests in the streets of Yangon, Myanmar, seeking more political and social freedoms from its authoritarian military dictatorship. Included in the group of protesters were Buddhist monks, who are highly respected in Myanmar society. This photograph shows some of the monks sitting to pray after they were stopped by riot police and the military. To end the protests, the police eventually opened fire, reportedly killing 9 protesters and wounding 11 others; some police were also injured. The government also sent police to arrest about 100 Buddhist monks in their homes and monasteries. How could the Myanmar government’s response to the protesters and the monks be seen as a rejection of the will of the people?

A **military dictatorship** is the most common form of authoritarian government today. In a military dictatorship, military leaders control all key political positions, usually after overthrowing the previous government. Under these governments, civilians are seldom allowed to have any real power. Leaders of military dictatorships often declare a “state of emergency” due to political turmoil or civil disorder, which gives them the power to suspend citizens’ civil and political rights and freedoms. Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Chile under General Augusto Pinochet, Uganda under Idi Amin, and currently Myanmar (Burma) under Senior General Than Shwe are examples of military dictatorships.

### **Minority Tyrannies**

A **minority tyranny** is a form of government in which a small group of people have political control over the majority of the population. Probably the best known example of minority tyranny in the 20th century is that of the National Party government in South Africa (1948–1994), during which only white South Africans were allowed citizenship and full political rights. The South African government at this time used an “apartheid” system that divided people based on race. Under the apartheid system, it withdrew land ownership, mobility rights, and many other rights from non-white South Africans. Although the South African government at this time allowed different political parties and held elections, only members of the white minority could vote and run for office.



#### **PAUSE AND REFLECT**

**To what extent do the practices of authoritarian governments reflect liberal beliefs and values? How does this compare to the practices of democratic governments described in the previous section?**



▲ **Figure 11-24** After spending most of his life in prison for leading an uprising of black South Africans against apartheid, Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa in 1994 after the apartheid policy had been abolished.

### Summary

Although representatives in a democracy are often elected based on the promise that they will follow the will of the people, governments occasionally disregard what the people they represent want. Sometimes public safety and security is given as the reason. Sometimes governments believe that they are protecting the citizens or serving the needs of the country. Sometimes, during emergencies, governments may believe they have to make decisions that go against the will of the people to protect the common good.

Based on the examples presented in this section, what answer do you have to this section's Question for Inquiry: *Should democratic governments ever disregard the will of the people?* What further insight have you gained into the Chapter Issue: *To what extent do democratic governments have an obligation to do what people want?*

### Knowledge and Understanding

1 Identify and explain two examples from this section of how a democratic government has disregarded the will of the people. Provide one reason used by the government in each example. Do you

believe the governments were justified in their actions? How did the people respond? Did they have any options?

2 Is public safety and security a valid reason to disregard the will of the people in a democracy? Support your answer with two reasons and evidence from the chapter.

## Mandatory Voting

### Something to Think About:

Should voting be compulsory in Canada?

### An Example:

Voting is necessary for a democracy to function properly. In the 2006 Canadian federal election, only 64.9 per cent of eligible voters turned out to vote. In Australia's 2004 election, there was a 94.5 per cent voter turnout rate. You may wonder why there is such a big difference. The answer lies in legislation. In Canada, voting is non-compulsory, and, since the 1990s, all federal elections have had a voter turnout rate below 70 per cent. In Australia, voting is mandatory by law and the voter turnout rate has not fallen below 94 per cent since 1955. Do you think that voting should be compulsory in Canada?

### News Story about Mandatory Voting:

*Senator Mac Harb was interviewed after his speech on mandatory voting to the Frontier Centre for Public Policy in Winnipeg on October 4, 2005.*

### Frontier Centre: Why do you want to make voting mandatory?

**Mac Harb:** Because of the fact that people, young people in particular, are not participating in the electoral process; less than one out of four bother.

### FC: Do you think that policy should apply at all three levels of government?

**MH:** I believe that all three levels of government should adopt mandatory voting to ensure that all the people vote at all times for those who govern them.

**FC: More than thirty countries have mandatory voting but most of them don't enforce the law. Wouldn't we be creating another victimless crime that is a waste of resources to enforce?**

**MH:** Not at all. The mere fact that you have a law creates a deterrent. Seat-belt law is a case in point. Even though we don't do a lot of enforcement of seat-belt compliance, the compliance rate is about ninety percent. I believe that just having the law would by itself have a positive impact.

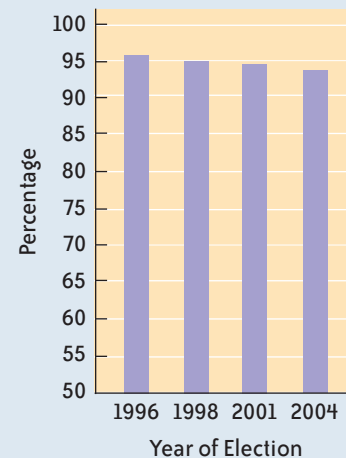
**FC: Should such a provision be embodied in the constitution or in statutory law?**

**MH:** No, it should be a part of legislation or bylaws at the municipal level.

**FC: Should voting merely be declared to be a civic duty as in Italy's constitution or established as an affirmative citizen obligation, as in Australia?**

**MH:** I would go with the Australian formula, because their system is very similar to ours.

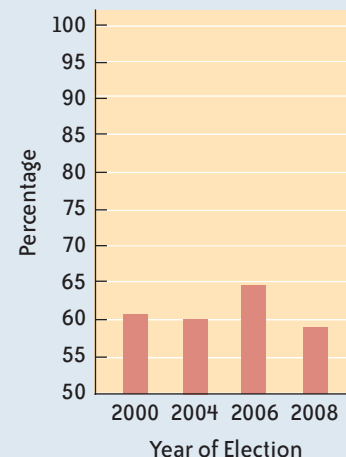
**Voter Turnout in Australia**



Source: Gerard Newman, "Federal election results 1949–2004." Research Brief, no. 11, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2004–2005.

▲ **Figure 11-25** Voter turnout in Australian federal elections, 1996–2004

**Voter Turnout in Canada**



Source: Elections Canada, <http://www.elections.ca/scripts/OVR2008/default.html>.

▲ **Figure 11-26** Voter turnout in Canadian federal elections, 2000–2008



**FC:** According to many, Australia has much better government policy than many countries, including Canada. In your opinion, is mandatory voting part of that?

**MH:** I take the position that, because of the fact that they have mandatory voting, they have more representative government than we do.

**FC:** Aren't you confusing rights with responsibilities? Classical liberal rights are negative in nature; they only require you to be left alone.

**MH:** Rights go with responsibilities. We have a right to drink fresh water but we have the responsibility to ensure that we pay taxes in order to keep waterways clean.

**FC:** In Australia where compulsory voting is at least minimally enforced, they have a problem called the “donkey vote,” where unwilling voters exercise their franchise randomly. Wouldn't we be making the process a joke?

**MH:** That is the question, to do or not to do. In fact you have to look at the lesser of the two evils, and the lesser here is to ensure that everybody votes and then go out and educate those who you believe need education.

**FC:** Australia's voters also spoil more than five percent of their ballots. Why bother to drag people out if that's what they will do?

**MH:** The reality of it here is that those who do not vote are close to about thirty percent. At five percent, I would say it was worth the effort for us, for the sake of five-percent waste to reach out to the other twenty-five percent.

—Source: “Senator Mac Harb, Liberal Party of Canada,” interview with the Frontier Centre, October 22, 2005. Frontier Centre for Public Policy, [http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication\\_detail.php?PubID=1178](http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=1178).

Questions for Reflection

1 Debate the main ideas in this interview. In preparation for the debate, classify the major arguments for both sides of the issue using a Plus, Minus, Interesting Chart.

Plus (Positive)	
Minus (Negative)	
Interesting	

Inside the chart, list positive, negative, and interesting ideas about mandatory voting from the interview.

2 Evaluate both sides, and make an informed decision. Are you for or against mandatory voting? If you had to create a political campaign to promote and defend the side that you chose, what would your main arguments be?

3 In what ways might mandatory voting better reflect the will of the people?



▲ **Figure 11-27** Canadian artist Michael de Adder created this cartoon after only 58.8 per cent of eligible Canadians voted in the 2008 Canadian federal election. How would you describe his viewpoint?

## FURTHER EXPLORATION

- 1 To what extent should democratic governments do what people want?
  - a) Write a short reflection piece based on the following: What is the difference between authoritarian governments and democracies on the issue of listening to the will of the people?
  - b) List as many ways you can think of in which democratic governments can be made aware of the will of the people. Choose two of the most effective, and explain why they would work.
- 2 Identify some examples in Alberta or another Canadian province or territory in which the government has made decisions that go against the will of the people. How has a particular issue, such as the environmental and economic impact of the energy industries of Alberta, caused conflicting perspectives and a need for a response that considers the will of the people involved? For example, considering the energy industry issue in Alberta, you could determine how some decisions have caused a conflict between the will of the workers, the will of the industries and companies involved in producing the energy, the will of the government, and the will of those concerned about the effects of these activities (such as Aboriginal communities and environmentalists).
- 3
  - a) Browse through newspapers for news stories that discuss events in which governments have ignored or followed the will of the people. Are these stories mostly about democracies or authoritarian governments?
  - b) Debate an issue from a news story from a democratic country. Determine whether the government has ignored or followed the will of the people more often than past governments in that country. Include in the debate possible reasons for the differences in government policies.
- 4 Take all the major ideas of democracy that you have examined in this chapter and create a class mural titled “Democracy as an Ideology.”
- 5 Debate the following point of view: Societies that embrace liberal values, such as Canada, are finding it more difficult to continue to reflect the will of the people.
  - a) What possible reasons could explain this position?
  - b) What multimedia sources and communication strategies could best be used to support and defend this position?
  - c) Do you think that governments that choose to disregard the will of certain groups of people in society can continue to do so without consequences? Explain your answer.

## Chapter Summary and Reflection

The basic purpose of any government is to provide order and stability. Liberal democracies and **authoritarian** governments act differently when responding to the **will of the people**. Democracies use a variety of **representative** strategies to reflect the will of the people, such as **representation by population**, **political parties**, and different voting methods (for example, **first past the post** or **proportional representation**). They may also include some elements of **direct democracy**, such as **referendums** and **consensus decision making**. In a liberal democracy, the government usually follows the

will of the people. The amount of consideration given to the will of the people can change with each democratic government that the people elect, often depending on whether a **majority** or a **minority** government is formed. There are also times when liberal democracies choose to ignore the will of the people, such as during emergencies that threaten public safety and security. Based on what you have learned in this chapter, what answer have you constructed for the Chapter Issue: *To what extent do democratic governments have an obligation to do what people want?*